



## Perception and Participation of Nigerian Students in Deviant Sexual Activities

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**Abstract:** Although the history of sadomasochism now known as BDSM (bondage and discipline, dominance and submission and sadism and masochism) could be traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it began to gain popularity through mainstream media in 2011. Despite the plethora of information in social media and the extent of practices in Nigeria, academic and reliable statistics are not available or are rarely encountered. BDSM has been portrayed by the media to consist of the use of physical torture, verbal and emotional humiliation to derive sexual satisfaction. This study explored the practices of BDSM activities among youths' especially undergraduate students. A cross sectional survey was carried out in Lagos State using a structured questionnaire that was administered among undergraduate in three universities. The questionnaire evaluated participation in three BDSM categories - Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission and Sadism and Masochism. Data were analysed using univariate and bivariate statistical techniques. The result indicated that there is a prevalence of BDSM activities among youths. Also, participants in the older age groups are fewer than others. Dominance and Submission records the highest frequency among others. The prevalence rate between males and females was comparable as there was no significant difference.

**Keywords:** BDSM, youth, prevalence, fetishes, sexual behaviour, participation, Nigeria

## Introduction

Even though, bondage and discipline, dominance and submission and sadism and masochism (BDSM) became popularly known in 2011, sexual practices related to it dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Cannon-Gibbs, 2016). Globalisation and education aided by social media have brought a paradigm shift in socialisation among youths especially in terms of sexual behaviour. Contrary to time immemorial when parents were in charge of enlightening their children and when formal education on sexuality centred on topics around hygiene. Older girls were taught self-esteem, respect, self-control and modesty while boys, on leaving schools, are tempted by factory and workshop life (Ajidahun, 2013).

Today, media distributes information on diverse sexual activities to both the young and the old. That young people practise BDSM is not new, yet statistical evidence is unavailable to support this claim. Some BDSM activities involves physical torture, use of force, infliction of pain and verbal abuse for sexual excitement; these activities are considered assault if consent is not given (Ortmann & Sprott, 2013). However, young people are known for engaging in risky, forceful and socially unacceptable sexual behaviour (WHO, 2011). Sexual assault is considered a common occurrence among undergraduates in Nigeria (Kullima, Kawuwa, Audu, Mairiga & Audu, 2010). Studies on sexual assault among youths in Nigeria show that 13.8% females reported sexual assault in Maiduguri (Kullima et al, 2010), while 11.6% of both sexes reported sexual assault in Ibadan (Ajuwon, 2005). This study explored the practices of BDSM

among youth especially undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Lagos state.

## Literature Review and Theoretical framework

BDSM is a lifestyle that comprises of a variety of atypical sexual behaviours and practices. Due to this variation, a single working definition for BDSM may be difficult. However, it is defined sexual practise involving a consensual exchange of either power or pain, which are sometimes not mutually exclusively (Holvoet *et al.*, 2017). BDSM is an acronym for bondage and discipline (sexual practises that involves physical restraint and humiliation), dominance and submission (sexual practises that involves power exchange and role playing), sadism and masochism (sexual practises that involves the infliction of pain) (Alison, Santtilla, Sandnabba & Nordling, 2001, Silva, 2015).

Related to BDSM is fetishism. Fetishism is a sexual practice that involves the use of inanimate object to achieve sexual satisfaction (Holvoet *et al.*, 2017). BDSM first appeared in the popular work of psychiatrist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing; *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) (Wismeijer & Van Assen, 2013). After which psychologist, Sigmund Freud (1905) traced the origin of this behaviour to childhood abuse (physical, sexual and verbal) and conflict at the infant stage of human development. He specifically describes sadism and masochism as an attempt to get back control by replicating abusive experiences of childhood in adulthood. Both Krafft-Ebing and Freud described BDSM as having underlying psychopathy (Weinberg, 2006, Weiss, 2012, Cannon-Gibbs, 2016). Those

who rejected this assumption argued that pathologizing atypical sexual behaviour has long been a habit of psychologists and psychiatrist (Shaw, Butler, Landridge, Gibson, Barker, Lenihan, Nair & Richard, 2012). Studies deviating from pathologizing BDSM, argued that sadomasochism be removed from the list of paraphilic disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual since there is no study that proves that it is a mental disorder (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2006). However, other studies insisted that they remain on the list to propel further studies (Krueger, 2010).

Despite the rise of BDSM communities and community studies, the practice is still stigmatized because it is assumed to deviate from social norm. Labels such as perversion, deviant and paraphilia are still used to describe BDSM activities; therefore practitioners adopt several strategies to conceal their involvement with BDSM (Stiles & Clark, 2011, Bezreh, Weinberg & Edgar, 2012). Also, discovery by family and friends can cause distress and affect one's social functioning (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2006). However, a study of college students records that 60% of male students have fantasied about bondage and sadism (William, 2009). Another study recorded that less than 5% of the Australian population practice BDSM (Richters, De Visser, Rissel, Grulich & Smith, 2008). In a study conducted in Quebec, 19.2% of the population indicted that they have experienced masochism, while 5.5% have practiced sadism (Joyal & Carpenter, 2017). The subcultural theory of deviance concerns itself with norms, practices and values held by a certain subgroup in society that are not in conformity

with generally acceptable norms. BDSM activities have been labelled deviant because it does not align with societal norms of sexuality (Shaw *et al.*, 2012). Cohen (1955) argued that delinquent subcultures adopts its norms from the society and changes it to suit its course. For instance, BDSM adopts role playing from the family structure. Participant take on roles to engage in BDSM; the roles are dominant, submissive and switch (William, Emily, Prior, Alvarado, Thomas & Christensen, 2016). He further talks about the rejection of mainstream culture. The BDSM community refer to mainstream sexuality as 'vanilla' (Tomazos, O'Gorman & MacLaren, 2017). He mentioned how excellent performances of subcultural values bring respect and recognition among contemporaries. Pain tolerance is highly valued in the BDSM community; masochists display marks and bruises as trophies showing strength, tolerance and resilience (Newmahr, 2010). Challenging oneself to master pain is a goal that each participant seeks to attain (Silva, 2015).

### **Methods**

A cross-sectional survey was carried out in Lagos state using a structured questionnaire. The method was employed to explore the statistical quantifiable rates (prevalence rate) and types of BDSM activities among the youth which are currently and completely absent in the existing literature. The questionnaire was administered among 300 university students randomly selected across Lagos metropolis. Three universities were randomly selected out of 5 universities listed in the JAMB

brochure for Lagos metropolis. The sample was then stratified by gender (male and female) and respondents were selected randomly according to these strata. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher in the three universities; respondents were given privacy to minimize interviewer bias.

### Variable measurement

The respondents were stratified into gender (male=1, female=2) and age groups (15-19 years=1, 20-24 years =2, 25 and above=3). Other demographic variables relevant to the study population were analysed. Educational background of respondents was classified into academic status (undergraduate=1, postgraduate=2) and last academic qualification (SSCE=1, OND=2, HND/BSc=3, Masters/PhD=4). Information on sexual relationship and behaviour such as relationship status (not in relationship=1, in relationship=2, cohabiting=3 engaged=4, married=5), frequency of current sexual relations with partner (very often=1, often=2, never=3) and respondent perception of sexual relation. A list of 14 BDSM activities which comprised of items for bondage and discipline (do you or your partner practices light beatings or smacking during sex?), dominance and submission (do you or your partner role play during sex?) and sadism and masochism (do you or your partner claw, bite or pinch during sex) was included. Participation in each category was measured (yes=1, no=2) as well as the frequency of practice (most times=1, sometimes=2, never=3). Knowledge of other practitioners was requested. Enquiry was made about the use fetishes each

category (Dress in costumes during sex) and the frequency of use.

### Data Analysis

The study employed the use of univariate and bivariate analysis. Firstly, a factor analysis was used to categorize 14 BDSM activities into 3 groups, then the study employed descriptive analysis (cross-tabulation) to explore practices of BDSM activities by gender. Another bivariate analysis was done using multiple correlations. This was used to explore the use of the different fetishes to know the level of association.

### Ethical Consideration

There was approval for study from the Covenant University Ethical Committee. However, every respondent willingly gave consent before filling the questionnaire.

### Results

In the sample (N=300), both strata were moderately represented by 111 males to 143 females (N= 254). Table 1 shows the selected demographic variables analysed. The result revealed that respondents between the ages of 20-24 (52.4%) are represented more than others. The proportion of males and female students was 43.7% and 56.3% respectively. The gender categories were well represented. The proportion of undergraduate students was as high as 94.9%, while postgraduate students (5.1%) were poorly represented. The proportion of the population affiliated with Christianity was 58.3%, Islam was 40.9% and traditional religion was 0.8%. Christians and Muslims were well represented unlike traditional worshippers. A relatively large number of the population said they were not in any relationship representing 54.7% of the population,

36.6% said they were in relationships while others were either married or cohabitating. Student cohabitating was

represented by a proportion 5.9% which was higher than the proportion of those married (2.8%).

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
15-19	86	33.9
20-24	133	52.4
25 and above	35	13.8
Gender		
Male	111	43.7
Female	143	56.3
Religious Affiliation		
Christianity	148	58.3
Islam	104	40.9
Tradition	2	.8
Relationship status		
Not in relationship	139	54.7
in relationship	93	36.6
Cohabiting	15	5.9
Married	7	2.8
Academic Status		
Undergraduate	241	94.9
Postgraduate	13	5.1
Academic Qualification		
SSSCE	171	67.3
OND	38	15.0
HD/BSc	38	15.0
Masters/PhD	7	2.8
Total	254	100

Source: Researcher’s field survey (2019)

**Gender representation practitioners and non-practitioners of BDSM activities**

The table below shows the gender representation of the practitioners and non-practitioners of BDSM activities in categories. A proportion 15.4% of the population says they practice bondage and discipline, while 20.1% say they practice dominance and submission and 10.2% practice sadism and masochism. Note that involvement in one BDSM category does not exclude the involvement in other

categories. In summary, the proportion of participants involved in all three BDSM categories is 18.1% while the proportion of those not in all three categories is 81.9%. The practice of bondage and discipline, dominance and submission and sadism and masochism are comparable in males (56.8%) and females (43.2%), but slightly higher in male in all categories. Dominance and submission are practiced more frequently than other BDSM activities. Among others sadism and masochism rates the

lowest in terms of involvement, both in the male and female category. The population involved in BDSM in all

three categories are proportionately comparable.

Table: Illustrating the Gender representation of BDSM practitioners in each BDSM categories

Variables	Male		Female		Total
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Bondage and discipline	21(53.8%)	90 (41.9%)	18 (46.2%)	125 (57.7%)	254
Dominance and Submission	30 (58.8%)	81 (39.9%)	21 (41.2%)	122 (60.1%)	254
Sadism and masochism	15 (57.7%)	96 (42.3%)	11 (42.3%)	131 (57.7%)	254

Source: Researcher’s field survey (2019)

**Methods and modes of fetish (tools) usage in BDSM activities**

The table below shows the correlation fetishes in all BDSM categories. Where two variables meet or intersect, that is the bivariate correlation, but where a variable meets with itself it is called a perfect correlation (1.000). Fetishes for bondage and discipline and dominance and submission tended to inter-correlate; use cuff, blindfold, chain, whip, belt and rope correlated with dress in costumes (r=0.161,

P<.05). Likewise, tools for bondage and discipline and sadomasochism inter-correlated; use cuff, blindfold, chain belt and rope correlated with use of clamp and clips, and use of plugs (r=0.189, P<.0.01) (r=0.323, P<.0.01) respectively. Similarly, body part fetishes inter-correlated; buttocks (use of plugs) correlated with breasts (use of clamp and clips) (r =0.181, P<.0.01). All the fetishes analysed inter-correlated in all categories.

Table 3: Illustrating multiple correlation of fetishes in BDSM activities

Fetishes	1	2	3	4
1 Use cuff, blindfold, chain, whip, belt and rope (bondage and discipline)	1.000	0.161*	0.189**	0.323**
	.	0.012	0.003	0.000
	248	247	246	248
2 Dress in costumes during sex (dominance and submission)	0.161*	1.000	0.233**	0.267**
	.012	.	.000	.000
	247	253	252	253

3 Use of clamps and clips (sadism and masochism)	0.189**	0.233**	1.000	0.181**
	0.003	0.000	.	0.004
	246	252	252	252
4 Use plugs (Sadism and masochism)	0.323**	0.267**	0.181**	1.000
	0.000	0.000	0.000	.
	248	253	252	254

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

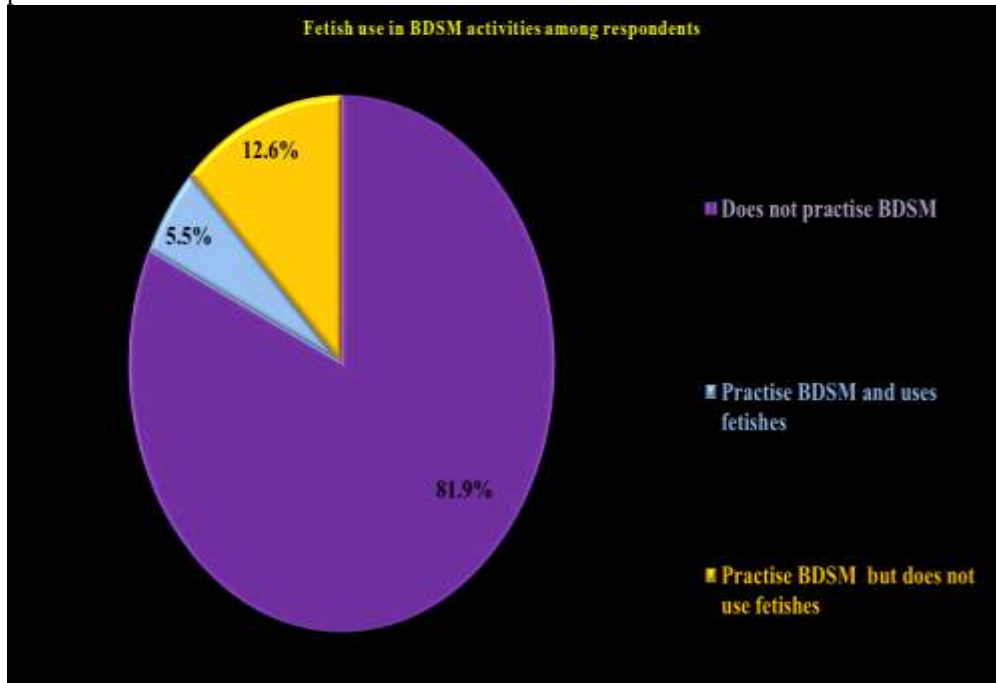
\*\*.. Correlation is significant at the level 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Proportion of fetish users, BDSM practitioners and BDSM non-practitioners**

The figure below shows the proportion of those who are involved the use of fetishes in practising BDSM (5.5%), while those who practise BDSM but

do not uses fetishes are 12.6%. In summary, 18.1% of the population practise BDSM but only 5.5% use fetishes in the practise. The population not involved in BDSM or fetish use is 81.9%.

Figure 1: Illustrating the proportion of fetish users, BDSM practitioners and BDSM non-practitioners



Source: Researcher’s field survey, (2019)

**Discussion of Findings**

The study provided empirical analysis exploring the practice of BDSM activities among youth in three tertiary institutions in Lagos state. Information from the study identified specific BDSM activities practiced in among youth. This study added to the body of knowledge on youth sexual behaviour and practices. It also supports the studies that have be able to prove that young adults are predispose to behaviours that are inimical to their social and sexual wellbeing (Amoo, Igbino, Imphonopi, Bajo, Ajaro, Akinyemi, Igbokwe & Solanke, 2018). Involvement in BDSM activities in the young population was found because 15.2% the total sample had performed at least one BDSM activity. Interest in BDSM activities differs; some participants prefer specific activities

while others are more flexible depending on the context (Wismejer & Van Assen, 2013). Activities often overlap, most times some activities are performed alongside another. All fetishes in all the categories of BDSM activities were comparable, and strangely, highly intercorrelated. BDSM and fetish practice had no significant difference in males and females. Compared with previous research, these prevalence rates seem high and are in contrast with the findings of Richters *et al.*, (2008), fewer than 5% of the general population had engaged in BDSM during sex and Holvoet *et al.*, (2017) having a rate of 7.6% for BDSM practitioners. However, both studies included BDSM activities with other sexual interest closely related to it. The prevalence rate from the above



studies is rather less when compared to the rate of from our sample of those who practice all categories of BDSM activities (i.e., 15.2%). The use of an extensive list of specific BDSM activities and fetishes (including potentially “milder” activities) also could explain the higher prevalence percentages in our sample compared with those of other studies. As expected, males were more likely than females to report engaging in this range of activities to obtain. However, the study discovered that there is no significant difference in the involvement of both genders.

Correlation among fetishes in BDSM activities, signified that the population engage fetishes in BDSM activities and more surprisingly, they combine fetishes. The study is faced limitations in the representation of older age groups; this age group included those in the postgraduate category. Older age groups such as 25 and above were represented less as compared to others.

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Also, the tertiary institutions did not include private university, this is because of the sensitive of the study and the difficulty in getting approval to recruit respondents from the population.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

This study shows that Nigerian youths are involved in BDSM activities. The overrepresentation of respondents in younger age groups and in the undergraduate category shows that most of the BDSM practitioners are young with relatively lower educational attainment. This means that there is a need for sensitization of the younger population on the dangers of practising BDSM. Health organisations should teach young people about self-respect and respect in sexual relationships. Further research is needed to explore the practises of BDSM communities in Nigeria. Another area to work on is the age of awareness and mode of first exposure of BDSM practitioners.

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